influenza vaccinations for the pilgrims. The Haj Committee of India in coordination with the State Haj Committees provides to the pilgrims information regarding confirmation of their seats, travel documents, transportation, accommodation, release of foreign exchange, embarkation points and departure dates etc. For direct Haj flights from India, Varanasi was added as Sixteenth embarkation point in 2007 and Indore has been added as Seventeenth embarkation point for 2008. The Government have taken a number of decisions to streamline the functioning of Private Tour Operators so that they provide proper services and facilities for the pilgrims. The Government provide' adequate funds every year for these requirements. The expenditure incurred by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in connection with Haj arrangements and subsidy provided for air transportation for Haj pilgrimage during the last two years is as follows:

Financial Year	Expenditure incurred by MEA	Year	Subsidy (Provisional)
2006-07	Rs.23,35,42,728	Haj 2006-II	Rs. 367 crores
2007-08	Rs.22,82,64,018	Haj 2007	Rs. 387 crores

Grant to Afghanistan

692. SARDAR TARLOCHAN SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the amount of grant that has been given to Afghanistan in last three years;

(b) whether any historic religious place of Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists have also been given grant for repairs; and

(c) the steps Government takes for the welfare of the Hindus and Sikhs who are left in Afghanistan?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Government of India have spent Rs.1178.39 crores during the last three years as aid to Afghanistan.

(b) No grant has been provided for repair of religious places in Afghanistan.

(c) The Embassy and the Indian Consulates in Afghanistan take all appropriate measures in this regard and remain in regular touch with local community leaders.

Fishermen in jails of Pakistan

693. SHRI VIJAY KUMAR RUPANI:
SHRI NATUJI HALAJI THAKOR:
SHRI KANJIBHAI PATEL:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 3293 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 24th April, 2008 and state:

(a) whether recently Pakistan authorities have released some of the fishermen;

(b) if so, the number of fishermen released, so far;

(c) if so, the number of fishermen belonging to Gujarat released;

(d) the number of fishermen still lodged in Pakistan jails; and

(e) the number of fishermen belonging to Gujarat State?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (e) On 15th August 2008, Pakistan released 34 juveniles from amongst the Indian fishermen. In the year 2008, Pakistan has released in all 131 fishermen. Presently there are 435 Indian fishermen, including those from Gujarat State, in Pakistani custody.

Attack on Indian Embassy

694. SHRI RAJ KUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a suicide bomber blasted some portion of Indian Embassy in Kabul on 7th July, 2008;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the number of persons of Indian origin including Embassy staff and others killed/injured in the incidents;

(d) whether anybody owned responsibilities for the incident; and

(e) if so, the details thereof and if not, the action Government has taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (c) On 7th July 2008, at 0831 local time, a vehicle borne improvised explosive device was exploded by a suicide bomber near the entrance gate of the Indian Embassy in Kabul. The attack resulted in the tragic deaths of Shri V.V. Rao, Counsellor, Brig. R.D. Mehta, Defence Attach in the Embassy and their Afghan driver Mr. Neamatullah who were in an Embassy vehicle. Constable Ajay Singh Pathania (ITBP), Constable Roop Singh (ITBP) and 55 Afghan nationals (including 11 security personnel and 17 schoolchildren) were also killed. More than 150 persons received injuries. A large number of vehicles, both inside and outside the Chancery premises, were badly damaged. The Chancery building was also badly damaged. The attack on our Embassy was a dastardly terrorist attack perpetrated by the enemies of peace in Afghanistan and our region.

(d) and (e) No one has claimed the responsibility for the attack. There have been detailed investigations by the Afghan Security Agencies and our own agencies into the attack. Investigations to identify all the perpetrators are continuing.

Demands of Haj Sewa Samiti

695. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Haj Sewa Samiti has lately demonstrated outside Parliament House in New Delhi and other cities in the country;

(b) if so, their precise demands; and

(c) Government's response thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Yes. One organization called the Haj Sewa Samiti has demanded for:

(1) Grant of autonomous status and delegation of more powers to the Haj Committee of India (HCOI) and State Haj Committees by way of appropriate amendments in the Haj Committee Act, 2002; and